

Message Text

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LONDON PLEASE PASS TO USDAO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: NATO, MILI, PFOR, UK

SUBJECT: DEPLETED URANIUM (DU) AMMUNITION

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REF: A. NATO 5811, DTG 241750Z OCT 75 (NOTAL)

B. USDAO LONDON ARMA 1955 OCT 75, DTG 231509Z OCT 75

(NOTAL)

1. DEPARTMENT AND DEFENSE HAVE REVIEWED REFS AND PREPARED FOLLOWING GUIDANCE FOR YOUR BACKGROUND AND USE ON AN IF-ASKED BASIS IN RESPONSE TO PRESS AND PUBLIC INQUIRIES REGARDING USE OF THE 105 MILIMETER DU AMMUNITION.

2. QUOTE: DEPLETED URANIUM (DU) IS A HEAVY METAL. ONE OF ITS USES IS IN EXPERIMENTAL 105 MILIMETER ANTI-ARMOR AMMUNITION. THIS IS AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM AND NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE TO PROCURE SUCH MUNITIONS. DU IS EFFECTIVE BECAUSE OF ITS HIGH DENSITY WHICH RESULTS IN SIGNIFICANT WEIGHT IMPACTING A SMALL AREA OF TARGET, THUS ENHANCING PENETRATION AND SPALLING. THE DU IN THE MUNITION WILL BURN CONVENTIONALLY THROUGH SELF-IGNITION ON IMPACT, BUT THE HAZARDS RELATED TO SELF-IGNITION ARE NOT SIGNIFICANT OUTSIDE OF THE IMMEDIATE TARGET AREA AND ARE OF VERY SHORT DURATION.

DEPLETED URANIUM IS THE RESIDUE LEFT FROM NATURAL URANIUM

AFTER THE ENRICHMENT PROCESS WHEN THE MAJORITY OF THE FISSIONABLE ISOTOPE, U235, IS REMOVED. BECAUSE OF ITS HIGH DENSITY, DEPLETED URANIUM IS USED AS COUNTERWEIGHTS IN MILITARY AND COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT. IT IS ALSO USED AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MORE CONVENTIONAL SUBSTANCES SUCH AS LEAD AS A SHIELDING MATERIAL IN CONTAINERS IN WHICH HIGHLY RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS LIKE COBALT 60 ARE STORED AND USED. IT PROTECTS PEOPLE CARRYING SUCH CONTAINERS BY SCREENING THEM FROM THE RADIATION THAT WOULD OTHERWISE EMANATE FROM THE CONTAINER. AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE LOW RADIATION OF DU, A GUN CREW CONTINUALLY FIRING DEPLETED URANIUM MUNITIONS OVER A PERIOD OF ONE YEAR WOULD NOT BE EXPOSED TO ANY HARMFUL RADIATION--IN FACT, IT WOULD BE LESS THAN IF EXPOSED TO URANIUM ORE IN ITS NATURAL STATE FOR A COMPARABLE PERIOD. SOME SAFETY PRECAUTIONS COMMON TO WORKING WITH ANY MOLTEN METAL OR IN DUSTY MACHINING AREAS ARE NECESSARY IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS. THE TOXICITY OF DU IS COMPARABLE TO UNCLASSIFIED UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT OF LEAD AND INHALATION OF ITS DUST PARTICLES SHOULD BE AVOIDED AS SHOULD THE INHALATION OF LEAD PARTICLES. ALTHOUGH SOME OXIDE PARTICLES ARE AEROSOLIZED UPON IMPACT, ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE PARTICLES ARE RESPIRABLE AND THESE SETTLE TO THE GROUND WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, THUS PRESENTING A MINISCULE HAZARD IN COMPARISON TO OTHER COMBAT HAZARDS IN THE TARGET AREA. END QUOTE

3. THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESPONDS DIRECT-

LY TO THE OCTOBER 22 GUARDIAN ARTICLE AND MAY BE USED
AS APPROPRIATE.

A. DU PENETRATORS OFFER A DISTINCT BALLISTICS ADVANTAGE
IN ABILITY TO PENETRATE A TARGET AT SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER
RANGES.

B. THE SELF-IGNITING PROPERTIES OF DU CAN CAUSE
SECONDARY DAMAGE IF THE PENETRATOR PIERCES AN OBJECT
SUCH AS A FUEL TANK BUT THESE RESULTS WOULD NOT BE DIF-
FERENT FROM THOSE OF ANY HIGH EXPLOSIVE ROUND PIERCING
THE FUEL TANK.

C. THERE IS NO NEED FOR, NOR DOES THE US ARMY CURRENTLY
PLAN OR ENVISION USE OF THIS TYPE OF AMMUNITION FOR
TRAINING PURPOSES.

D. IN THE MANUFACTURE OF DU PENETRATORS, THE DU IS NOT
SINTERED BUT ALLOYED, CAST, AND PROCESSED IN MUCH THE SAME
MANNER AS STEEL.

E. DUE TO THE MOBILITY AND SCATTER OF TARGETS, DU
PROJECTILES WOULD CAUSE NO SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OVER
NATURALLY OCCURRING RADIATION EVEN IN COMBAT AREAS.

F. THE INCREASED RISK OF CANCER IN URANIUM MINERS IS
RELATED TO THE RELATIVELY HIGH CONCENTRATION OF THE
RADIOACTIVE GAS, RADON, WHICH OFTEN OCCURS IN THESE
MINES AND NOT EXPOSURE TO THE URANIUM.

4. QUERIES WHICH CANNOT BE ANSWERED WITHIN THE CONTEXT
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OF THE ABOVE SHOULD BE TAKEN AND REFERRED TO WASH-
INGTON. KISSINGER

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